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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8549
INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1086
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0666
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0736
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000411

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/24/2014

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SUBJECT: FNDD REMAINS IN SOLIDARITY WITH ABDALLAHI

REF: DAKAR 793

Classified By: CDA DENNIS HANKINS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B AND D)

11. (C) Summary: FNDD co-President Mohamed Ould Maouloud denied Senegalese and European statements that the Front National pour la Defense de la Democratie (FNDD) and the Rassemblement des Forces Democratiques (RFD) were ready to accept implementation of the Dakar Accord without President Abdallahi's resignation. Maouloud reassured Charge that the FNDD remains in solidarity with President Abdallahi and that there are no divisions among the FNDD and RFD, who are in agreement about the importance of solving the High State Council (HSC) issue to ensure free and fair elections as well as Mauritania's future stability. Maouloud explained that President Abdallahi had even agreed to move forward with the formation of a government of national unity and election planning while continuing negotiations about the status of the HSC and his resignation. In light of this information, the decree signed today by Aziz's interim government convening the electoral college for a July 18 election is clearly a unilateral and confrontational measure. End summary.

12. (C) Prior to a June 24 meeting at the Senegalese Embassy regarding the Dakar talks resuming tomorrow in Nouakchott, Charge d'Affaires and PolOff met with FNDD's Mohamed Ould Maouloud to inquire about statements made by the Senegalese and the Europeans saying that the FNDD and RFD were ready to negotiate a deal to the exclusion of President Abdallahi (Reftel). In recent Dakar talks, Senegalese Foreign Minister Gadio and the Spanish and French Ambassadors tried to convince the US and other International Contact Group (ICG) members that the FNDD and RFD were eager to participate in elections and would be willing to move forward with implementation of the Dakar Accord without requiring President Abdallahi's resignation or consent as a legitimizing pre-condition. Charge assured Maouloud that the U.S. position was firm that we would not support a unilateral electoral strategy inconsistent with the consensual letter and spirit of the Dakar Agreement. If, however, there were divisions between the opposition parties and President Abdallahi that would see the FNDD accept something short of what the President wanted, we needed to know so we could reach a policy decision. Maouloud welcomed the frank question, but emphatically denied that the opposition parties and the President were on the outs. He stressed that the FNDD is with President Abdallahi and that there are no

divisions among the FNDD nor between the FNDD and RFD. He said they all want the HSC question solved to ensure election transparency and future stability for Mauritania. If the HSC remains in place, said Maouloud, Mauritania will doubt the legitimacy of the results, particularly if Aziz wins. The opposition is also concerned that the HSC could attempt a coup d'etat if Aziz loses the election. Mauritania's future political stability, stressed Maouloud, depends on the dissolution or "constitutionalization" of the HSC. Maouloud explained that the FNDD had left as a purely personal decision whether Abdallahi would resign or not. The HSC is not, however, just an Abdallahi issue (a matter of principle that, if he is to resign, he will not resign for a framework that is inherently unconstitutional). For the FNDD and RFD (Maouloud noted that the RFD statements on this had been even more emphatic than his) because it gets to the very question of whether there will be reasonably free and fair elections or whether the military will remain as the clear real power.

13. (C) Maouloud explained that President Abdallahi was not an obstacle to holding elections because he was willing to sign a decree forming the government of national union to allow election planning to move forward. He explained Abdallahi would transfer his powers to that government and then continue negotiating the HSC issue and the conditions for his resignation even if that ran through to the elections. Comment: Gadio told the ICG this was a possibility. Nevertheless, the ICG thought it was risky to engage in election planning while leaving the HSC issue and

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Abdallahi's resignation unsolved. If no agreement is reached before election day, things could fall apart and bring everything back to square one. End comment.

14. (C) Maouloud thanked Charge for the US position throughout the crisis, saying the opposition "is counting on the U.S." to defend legality. He denounced Aziz's interim government decision to move forward with elections as unilateral and Aziz's clear return to a confrontational posture. Comment: Today, the presidency released a communique convening the electoral college on July 18 "in accordance with the Dakar Agreements." The convocation gives candidates until Friday midnight to register their candidacies. The opposition was not consulted on this measure. The "interim president's" communique is a clear breach of the Dakar Accords on two fronts: it constitutes a unilateral action and does not respect the sequence of events described in the agreement, by which the process starts with Abdallahi's decree forming the national unity government.

15. (C) Comment: If Maouloud's statements are true, Gadio and the Europeans are being disingenuous by stating the FNDD and RFD are ready to drop Abdallahi or are falling for disinformation from the Aziz camp. We have little reason to doubt Maouloud because the FNDD and RFD position throughout the talks was consistent, clear and harmonized. We met privately at the Embassy giving Maouloud the chance to speak freely of any internal FNDD wrangling as he has in the past. Aziz's unilateral decision to move forward with elections will further alienate the opposition. It may be an attempt to distract them from the HSC issue and force them to quickly form the national unity government to avoid being left out or it may be a sign that Aziz does not care for consensus anymore. SEPTTEL will discuss views of the various facilitators on the eve of President Wade's arrival in Nouakchott. End comment.
HANKINS